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For Boise, a Sad Commentary

The fact that state flags were not flown at half mast until Dr. Martin Luther King's funeral ended Tuesday was unfortunate. Lt. Gov. Jack Murphy would have been wiser to issue a proclamation ordering that all state flags fly at half mast all day Tuesday.

Dr. King was the George Washington of the civil rights movement. It is understandable that people are sensitive about what might be considered, in any way, a failure to show proper reverence to his memory. We don't believe that was the intention of the lieutenant governor.

He indicated Thursday a willingness to recommend acceptance of an NAACP proposal to create a state civil rights commission to consider complaints. Idaho has had a civil rights law governing employment and public accommodations since 1961 but no formal machinery to enforce it.

The NAACP spokesmen indicated that the state government was guilty of "indifference" to the civil rights cause. If that is true there has also been a lack of effort in the past by civil rights spokesmen to correct the situation.

It is apparent that there is considerable indifference among Idahoans. Many people in Boise seemed surprised at the scope of the national reaction to Dr. King's assassination. They resented the fact that he got so much attention. Some even expressed satisfaction about the assassination.

It seems to us that white bigotry is as deplorable as the Negro violence that followed Dr. King's death, and that both are obstacles to national unity. Both will have to subside before we can overcome the national sickness symbolized by Dr. King's assassination and the violence that followed.

There is equal stupidity in the attitudes of whites who equate all Negroes with rioters, and blacks who equate all whites with Dr. King's assassin.

There is equal stupidity in the attitudes of whites who say that Negro people must demonstrate their "worthiness" to be treated equally, and blacks who call for an immediate end to economic inequities.

There are reasons why thousands of poor people in Negro slums are not "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps." But they can't be discovered by a person whose mind is closed by prejudice or hate. They can't be quickly or easily overcome.

The first step is for the white majority to take an objective look at the situation. People who are interested in that can purchase on the newsstands for $1.25 a paperback edition of the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.

What this, and other studies, show is that the poor Negro wants the same things that white want — a job, a decent home, an adequate education for his children and law and order in his community. He also wants to be treated with respect.

The white majority cannot deny that prejudice and bigotry have been, and remain, obstacles to black achievement. We think there is a distressing amount of prejudice in the city of Boise.

For many people the civil rights movement has been seen only as an iceberg might be seen on a distant horizon. Most of it was not in view. The picture of what is in view has been distorted by prejudice, by the riots and by those more gifted in teaching hate than understanding.

By now the nation should have had enough of violence and trauma to open its eyes to its problem — even in a state like Idaho where black people are a very small minority. Hatred and bigotry, by both whites and blacks, are destructive of what ought to be the common goal of seeking justice for all people.

The reservoir of animosity between the races is deep and there are people working to keep it filled. It will take an extra measure of determination by both whites and blacks, to drain it. There is still hope that it can be done.

In Idaho, where there has been no violence and where the black minority is small, we have a better opportunity than in most states. Whites must learn to overcome their prejudice — which is easy to learn and hard to avoid — and blacks must avoid being overly sensitive. Tolerance is a two - way street.

White people will have to recognize that most blacks do not riot and blacks will have to recognize that most whites are not bigots.

Neither economic injustice nor the assassination of Dr. King, should be considered adequate excuses for rioting. Nor is there any adequate excuse for bigotry.

The John Birch Society and the rest of the organized political right wing have tried to spread the doctrine that all civil rights activity is communistic. But leaders like Dr. King did not want to change American society, but to let black people participate in it. In the South the doctrine that civil rights is communistic has served as a mask for bigotry.

Partly because of Dr. King considerable progress was made in the South to change attitudes and give Negroes real equality.

In the Boise area, as elsewhere, the right wing has been busy tarring all civil rights advocates as Communists and Communist dupes. This helps create an atmosphere of hate, suspicion and intolerance — the kind of atmosphere that works to the advantage of advocates of black violence and racial separation like Stokely Carmichael.

But most of the prejudice that exists can't be blamed on right wing propaganda. It is the product of the nation's history. Hate and intolerance have been passed from generation to generation.

We think that Mayor Jay Amyx was wrong in his reluctance to permit an NAACP sponsored march on the Statehouse. If people want to stage a peaceful demonstration, they should be permitted to do so.

But there is some merit in the reason he gave — the possible danger to the marchers from hecklers. His statement that he recognizes such a danger is a reflection of the fact that hate and bigotry exist within this community.

If people cannot safely stage a peaceful march for civil rights in Boise it is a sad commentary. The fact that fears exist that they cannot shows that the time has come to put aside hatred and intolerance.

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